Watering Our Good Seeds

By Thich Nhat Hanh

I have a topic for Dharma discussion for the young people today. You have organized in groups, speaking the same language, and we expect you to bring your insights to the Sangha tomorrow. Twenty-four hours is not a lot. I don't like to set a deadline, if you are not ready tomorrow, then after tomorrow is all right. This is the Dharma discussion topic. Please remember.

Once upon a time there was a monk who was not happy. Maybe his name was *Freres Jacques*. You know the song, *Freres Jacques*? He was a lazy monk. He did not want to ring the bell in the morning. So, once upon a time there was a monk who was not so happy, and he blamed other monks for his unhappiness. He had a roommate, and his roommate was not happy either, because that monk always complained. He complained about this, complained about that. So sometime later the other monk asked to be moved to another room, to have another roommate.

Of course, like I do, you desire to help that monk to be happy so he would stop complaining. What can I do to help him? We have to find out. We are caught in a kind of dilemma, because I know if a person does not make people around him happy, he cannot be happy himself. And this applies not only to monks. If you are unable to make the people around you happy, how can you be happy? In the teaching of the Buddha I have learned one very basic thing: happiness is not an individual matter. Maybe some of you still believe that happiness can be sought by individuals that we should just go and look for our own kind of happiness.

Happiness we believe can be an individual matter, but according to the teaching of the Buddha, our teacher, happiness is not an individual matter. If the other person is not happy, there is no way that you can be happy. Look. Consider a couple. The couple might be husband and wife. If the husband is unhappy, do you think that the wife can be happy? No, I don't think so. If the wife is unhappy, do you think that the husband can be really happy? No. So there is no point of looking for individual happiness. If you want you to be happy, you have to make the other person happy. Take the example of another couple, a father and a son. Do you think that if the father is unhappy, the son can be happy? No. If the son

suffers so much, do you think that the father can be happy himself? No. That is why it is very realistic to see and to accept the fact that happiness cannot be an individual matter.

We have to practice looking deeply to really understand the teaching of the Buddha. A mother who is unhappy cannot make her daughter happy. If her daughter suffers so much, the mother will not be able to be happy herself. So it's clear that happiness is not a personal matter. Therefore, when we look at that poor monk we see that because he is not able to make the people around him happy, namely the other brothers, he cannot be happy. He seems to be trying to look for his individual happiness. But that is wrong. It is not in line with the teaching of the Buddha. So you might come to the conclusion that in order for that monk to be happy, he has to try to make the people around him happy, right? It seems logical. It seems clear that to be happy himself, he has to be able to make his roommate happy and other monks in the same monastery happy.

But there still is another problem. That is why I need you to practice looking deeply with me. How can an unhappy person make the people around him or her happy? Is there a way? He knows that if he cannot be happy, he cannot make people around him happy. He is motivated by the desire to make people around him happy, but because he has no happiness in himself, how could he share his happiness and make other people happy? Do you think that you have got the topic of the dharma discussion? That is a kind of dilemma. I need a young person to tell me whether I have presented the topic clearly enough.

I want you to spend one or two days sitting together, practicing breathing in, breathing out, deeply, doing walking meditation, in order to be calm, to be concentrated, and when you come together, you offer your insight as to how to help that monk. And the dilemma is that if that monk wants to be happy, he has to make people around him happy. The question remains that if he is unhappy, how can he make other people around him happy? And you grown up people, if you want to practice looking deeply to find out, you are welcome to do so.

Once upon a time there was an unhappy monk. That is the topic. But you can change the word “monk,” because it is not only a matter of monks and nuns. If you like, you can change it to an unhappy boy or girl, son or daughter, husband or wife. Chicolina, do you think it's clear enough? Good.

The last thing I would like to tell you today is that during the past week many children have practiced, have learned the practice of pebble meditation and the practice of inviting the bell of mindfulness to sound. I count on you, those who have been here one week, to help your friends who just arrived yesterday to

learn about these two practices. At the end of this week they will be able to do as well as you do. Do you think that you can do it for us? Inviting the bell, and practicing the pebble meditation? Good. I think that is enough as an assignment today. Have a happy day. When you hear the bell, stand up and bow to the Sangha before you leave to begin your practice.

[Bell]

Turn around to the Sangha. Bow. Go slowly, beautifully, like flowers.

[Bell]

Dear friends, today is the twenty-third of July 1997 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Listening to a Dharma talk is also a form of practice. We used to be in school, listening to lectures and so on, and during that time we got in the habit of using only our intellect, because what we needed in school was our intellect. But in a practice center a Dharma talk is not just a lecture. A Dharma talk is an opportunity to open ourselves up and to allow the deepest levels of our consciousness to be exposed to the Dharma. Instead of using the intellect, we put the intellect to rest, because our intellect has the tendency to compare, to judge, to evaluate, to arrange things and ideas and classify them into boxes.

The Dharma is not a lecture. The Dharma in the Buddhist tradition is a kind of rain. Our consciousness should behave like the soil, the earth. We have to allow the Dharma talk to penetrate. According to the Buddha we have seeds of understanding, of awakening, of compassion, within ourselves. We don't need these seeds to be transmitted from the teacher. We already have all of them in the depth of our consciousness. We call it store consciousness, sometimes earth consciousness. Because these seeds are buried deep in the mind, in the soil of our consciousness, it is very hard for them to grow and manifest. Above there are many layers of suffering, confusion, prejudices and so on, and our intellect can never go deep enough. Our intellect very often contradicts our deepest nature and therefore to allow the intellect to rest and to open our earth store in order for the rain of the Dharma to penetrate is very important. [Thây recites a poem in Vietnamese and then translates]

> The spring rain is falling gently
> and the earth and the soil of my consciousness
> is penetrated by the rain.
> And the seed deep within me
> now has a chance to be penetrated by the rain and to smile, sprouting.

We have to listen to the Dharma with that kind of spirit, to allow the soil of our consciousness to be penetrated by the Dharma rain, not using ideas, concepts, that we already have to compare and to classify. That is very important. If we are already used to that kind of listening, using only the intellect to judge, to compare, to classify, we have to learn a new way, because listening to a Dharma talk is not the same thing as learning the philosophy of Buddhism. They are two things, quite different. A lady who left us yesterday said that during one hour and a half, Thây said very much the same thing. He could have done it in fifteen minutes. She was very hungry for ideas, but she did not realize that a Dharma talk is a time for practice. The teacher is supposed to offer the Dharma rain in such a way that the good seeds in the people can be penetrated and can sprout and become flowers, the flower of understanding, the flower of compassion and so on.

Using our intellect is like using a nylon sheet to order to receive the rain, or nylon buckets to receive the rain. When you use a nylon sheet, you prevent the rain from penetrating into the soil. That is why there is a way to listen to Dharma talks. That way is not to use your intellect. You let your whole person be penetrated by the Dharma, and your person includes the body. We know that our consciousness has so many layers and the deepest layers are very difficult to reach and therefore we have to bring our selves to a state of oneness. The body is there and the mind is there, the consciousness is there, and we just allow the rain of the Dharma to fall.

In the time of the Buddha it is reported in many sutras, many people would get enlightened during the Dharma talk and their eyes would get very bright and they were released from the bondage they had carried with them for a long time. When the Buddha saw that person, he always said, “That person got liberated. That person has understood. That person has been transformed.” So transformation and hearing can be possible also during a Dharma talk. Don't believe that in a dharma talk you get the theory and then you go back to your tent and practice. No. Listening to a dharma talk is also a form of practice. That is why we have to sit in such a way that we are really present, body and consciousness at the same time. We have to dwell in the present moment. We have to allow ourselves to be available to the Dharma and the Dharma will be available to us.

Even if you feel sleepy and sit there dozing in the Dharma hall, it's much better than using your intellect. Yes, this is true, because even if you are sleeping, the Dharma talk has a way of penetrating you, but if you use your intellect, it is very difficult. Maybe you have had experience with someone in a coma. If you talk to her, she has a way of listening. She is present in a way that she can be receptive

when you talk to her. When you allow your intellect to rest, many beautiful things can penetrate into you and you get a transformation.

There are people who after listening to a Dharma talk have felt liberated, light, joyful, and they didn't have to do much. They didn't have to listen hard or make any effort. They just opened themselves up to the Dharma to entered. That is why we should consider the one hour and a half listening to the Dharma talk as a time of practice. It may be very important.

The other day I was talking about holiness and I said that the nature of holiness can be understood, can be recognized. We call someone "His Holiness" or "Her Holiness." But what makes us call him or her by that title "Holiness"? There is, or there may be, the substance of holiness in that person. In the Buddhist tradition the substance of holiness is mindfulness.

When I wrote *Living Buddha, Living Christ,* I said that mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha that is in you and its nature is the same nature as the Holy Spirit, because where there is mindfulness, there is life. Where there is attention, there is life. When you drink a glass of orange juice in mindfulness, you are real and the juice is real, and because you and the juice are real, life is real. If you drink your orange juice in forgetfulness, you are caught by your anger, your jealousy; you are caught by the past, by the fear of the future, you are not really there for your orange juice and your orange juice is not really there for you. So you and orange juice, both of you are not real, and therefore, life is not real at that moment.

So to drink mindfully means to be alive again, to live deeply that moment of orange juice drinking. Since the energy of mindfulness is in you, the energy of holiness is in you. Where there is mindfulness there is life, your presence and the presence of life in you. Then if you continue to contemplate mindfulness, you will see that you will become more concentrated. Yes, you drink mindfully your orange juice; you are concentrated, even if your juice is not concentrated. Every step you make when you practice walking meditation makes you concentrated. You touch life deeply every step you make. So mindfulness is there and concentration is there, also.

Mindfulness carries within itself the energy of concentration. If you are concentrated, you are strong. When you look deeply, you touch deeply, and because you are able to look deeply and touch deeply, you get insight. You understand the nature of what is there: the object of your touching, the object of your looking. Therefore, the energy of concentration carries itself. The energy of insight is a liberating factor. If we suffer because we don't understand, because we are overwhelmed by illusion, ignorance, once we get insight we no longer

suffer. We are no longer angry and suspicious. Therefore, our insight is the liberating factor, and without concentration and mindfulness, insight would not be possible. That is why I said that the energy of mindfulness is the vehicle transporting concentration and concentration carries itself.

Prajna is insight. Concentration is *samádhi*, and mindfulness is *smrti*. Smrti, samádhi, and prajña are the three steps of training in the Buddhist path. Our practice is recognizing the seed of mindfulness in us. In holy people, there is a seed of mindfulness, but in all of us there is also a seed of mindfulness. If you practice recognizing that seed deep in our consciousness and help it to grow and to manifest often, the energy of mindfulness increases all the time and it is the substance of holiness in us. So, first of all, the practice is to recognize that we do have that seed deep in our consciousness and this is easy because every one of us is able to drink our juice mindfully. Every one of us is able to look at a flower mindfully. Every one of us is capable of breathing in mindfully. So the seed of mindfulness is really there, deep inside of us. We don't live our daily life mindfully because we have not allowed that seed of mindfulness in us to be touched every day by ourselves and by the people around us. We have not been able to make it grow and become important in our lives.

The practice of mindfulness is first of all to recognize that seed and to do everything for that seed to be touched every day and to become a source of energy that will make us more alive in our daily life. When we know how to live mindfully, we live concentrated. And if we live concentrated, we begin to understand deeply. When we understand deeply, we suffer much less. If these three kinds of energies are within us, we are a holy person. We have no complex about that, because we know exactly what holiness means.

Holiness is something we can recognize. It is not abstract. If we look at a person and we know that she is mindful, she is alive, she is concentrated in each moment of her daily life, she is able to understand, to be compassionate, to forgive, then we know that holiness is in her. You can call her “Your Holiness.” No complex. Holiness is not a title conferred to someone just by society, but by the fact that we are able to generate the energy of mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

[Bell]

The bell of mindfulness was created to help us touch the seed of mindfulness and make it manifest. Every time we hear the sound of the bell, we go back to our breath and we breathe mindfully. Mindfulness of breathing nurtures the energy of mindfulness in us. It's easy to practice if you are surrounded by a sangha,

brothers and sisters who do the same. In Plum Village, every time you hear the bell, you see all the brothers and sisters going back to their breathing and enjoying their in-breath and their out-breath. You will do the same in a very natural way. In a few weeks, you will get the habit, the good habit of going back to your mindful breathing.

The same is true with your mindful walking. In Plum Village everyone walks mindfully. Each step is an opportunity for us to touch the seed of mindfulness in us. We enjoy every step we make. Before the practice, we only know how to run. We run because we think that happiness is not possible now and here. We have to run to the other end where happiness may be available. We have a long, long habit of running. We run even in our dreams. Our ancestors have run, and they have transmitted their habit of running to us and we shall transmit the habit of running to our children.

When we come to Plum Village, we learn that happiness is available in the here and the now. Why to you have to run? To breathe in and out feeling that you are alive, and to make a step feeling that walking on this beautiful planet is already a miracle, is enough for you to be happy right now. You don't need another condition to be happy. So learning to be happy here and now with the conditions of happiness that are already available, this is what we learn in Plum Village. That is why everyone tries to block the old habit of running. Blocking in a very nice way, not by fighting, but by initiating a new habit, the habit of walking like a free person, like a happy person. In the beginning you might pretend to be a free person, a happy person, because the habit is so strong, but after a few days being in the Sangha, you know that you can do it, you can enjoy every step you make. You say, “It's so simple! Why didn’t I know about it? Just breathe in, make a step, smile and you can be happy.” Some people still wonder, “How could it be so simple?” Something this simple might not be true, because we are used to complicated things. There is a person who was reading one of my books in a bus, and after reading it—it's a very short book—she closed it and began to practice right on the bus. She felt wonderful, because she didn't believe that truth is something very complicated.

Every two years we have a 21-day retreat here in Plum Village and everyone has to attend the whole retreat. We don't go in and out like in the summer opening here. On the first day, everyone is offered a sticker that they can put on their shoes. The sticker says, “I walk for you.” If you can make a peaceful step and get nourishment from that step, get peace and joy from making that step, not only do you make yourself healed, transformed, joyful, but you make other people happy, also. When you are happy you have something to share. When you are happy, you can make people around you happy. Our parents may not have had

the chance to enjoy mindful breathing, mindful walking, and they hurried for all their life. They didn't know how to enjoy their in-breath, out-breath, relaxation, and dwelling happily in the present moment. Now, we have a chance to learn it so that every breath I take in, I feel freedom, I feel relaxation, I feel peace.

I breathe in not only for me but I breathe in for all my ancestors. Practicing looking deeply, I know that all my ancestors are still alive in me, present in me. I am the continuation of my ancestors. Therefore I breathe in and I invite my mother, my father, my grandfather to breathe in with me. It's wonderful. I practice for them. I also practice for my children, because anything I do to me, I do to my ancestors, I do to my children. That awareness keeps me alive, keeps me on the right path. I wouldn't like to do anything that is harmful to my ancestors, to my children, to my grandchildren. That is love.

I have many children and grandchildren—many disciples, monastics and lay. I know if I am not mindful, they will suffer so much. So every step I make is for them. Every breath I take is for them. I should nourish myself with peace, with joy, for the sake of my ancestors, for the sake of my children and their children. Every step I make, every breath I take, is the practice of love. That is why we distribute the sticker, “I walk for you.” So it is your duty to make a step in a relaxing way to feel that you are alive. It is a privilege to be alive, to be still walking on this beautiful planet, to touch peace and love within ourselves. One step is very much, because if you able to make one step, you will be to be able to make two, and so on. I walk for you. I walk for my parents, my ancestors. Many people have brought their stickers home and continued their practice.

I have said that the practice should help us to recognize the seed of mindfulness in us and help it to manifest in our breathing, in our walking, in our eating, in our conversation and so on. In the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness is the substance of a Buddha. The Buddha is not something vague, a god, or just one person. The Buddha is the energy of mindfulness that is inherent in every one of us and we can make the Buddha in us grow apparent, strong. That light can shine on our life and help us to go in the direction of love, the direction of understanding.

The training here helps increase the capacity to be mindful. Yes, you are capable of being mindful, but we want you to increase that capacity. Every time you drink water and juice and tea, we want you to drink in mindfulness, not just from time to time. Every time you walk, we want you to walk mindfully, not just from time to time. The Sangha is here to remind you, to support you. During the time that you are here with your Sangha, please use the opportunity to really practice. Whether you go from your tent to the bathroom or to the kitchen or to

the meditation hall, adopt only one style of walking, walking meditation. Take more time and enjoy the walking.

In Plum Village, the monks and the nuns, all of them sign a treaty with their stairs. In your home there may be stairs, because you go up to sleep there and then in the morning you go down. There are days when you have to go up and down your stairs several times. When you sign a treaty with the stairs, you want to go up and go down only with peaceful, mindful steps. I have a hermitage very close to here and there are stairs. In 18 years I always go up and go down mindfully, enjoying every step. Never I have betrayed my treaty, violated my treaty. It has helped me. Now I can climb the Gridhrakuta Mountain, I can climb the Wu Tai Shan Mountain. I can climb any mountain, and everywhere I walk, including railway stations and airports, I walk in the same style: walking meditation, enjoying every step. I have quit running.

After signing that treaty, you have to respect it. Halfway up the stairs if you realize that you have not been walking mindfully, stop and go down again. Begin anew, breathing in, a step, and breathing out, another step, enjoying. It is very important. If you don't have stairs, then you can sign a treaty with a distance: for instance, the path that leads from your house to the bus station. You make a vow: from your house to that place you always walk mindfully. And if halfway you know that you have made unmindful steps, you go back. You walk again. Don't make it too long, to begin with. You will see the wonderful effect of such a practice on your life. Some years later you will find that you are walking the same way everywhere. You do that not only for yourself; no, you do it for all of us, for your children, for your ancestors, also.

There are many, many pleasant ways of doing it. There are several gathas like the one we sang here this morning. There are many wonderful gathas in Plum Village. Please learn them from your dharma teachers, from your brothers and sisters in the dharma. And practice with several gathas instead of just one. Like when you breathe in, you make two steps, “flower, flower”; and when you breathe out, you make another two steps, “fresh, fresh.” Or if you want to go faster, you make three steps: “flower, flower, flower; fresh, fresh, fresh.” But don't do it mechanically. Don't say the word—practice it. When you say, “flower, flower, flower,” you have to be a flower. When you say “fresh, fresh, fresh,” you have to make freshness into a reality. Otherwise, what are you doing?

After a few minutes, you may change to “mountain, solid.” Breathing in, you say, “mountain, mountain,” and you transform yourself into a mountain. You are walking with dignity. Each step is stability. You are not running. There are animals who walk like that, very majestically. The Buddha, also, he walked like

that. The monks and the nuns during the time of the Buddha used to hold a begging bowl and they walked like that. They radiate peace. People who saw them, many of them knelt down on the sidewalk, because people need this kind of stability and peace. So when you walk like this, you generate the energy of peace and stability within you and you inspire all of us. If it happens that I lose my awareness and I get into a hurry and I see you walking like that, your sight will be a bell of mindfulness bringing me back to myself and there I am walking beautifully again. That is why every one of us should make a contribution to the Sangha by his way or her way of walking and listening to the bell. Together we generate a powerful source of mindfulness that will penetrate into every one of us.

When I first came to America, I heard people say that a retreat should have no more than 30 people; otherwise it would not be serious. I didn't believe that too much, because I knew that if everyone in the retreat is mindful and if you combine the mindfulness of a large number of people, it will be very powerful. Everyone who happens to be there will be penetrated by the tremendous amount of energy emanating from the crowd. There were times when we practiced walking meditation with two thousand two hundred people in America. The people who came for the Day of Mindfulness had been in retreats and their practice was quite solid. There was no noise at all; there was no disorder at all. Everyone was walking mindfully, and it was very powerful. The energy penetrated each of us.

So if all of us, 300 or 400, know how to enjoy walking, generating stability and joy, then the collective energy will be powerful and every one of us will inherit, will profit from, that kind of energy. Each of you is needed. We need your contributions to the collective energy of the Sangha and walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, drinking mindfully, doing things mindfully is the way to do it. That practice helps increase the capacity to be mindful in us and in the people around us. Also, the practice in Plum Village helps to increase the capacity to keep mindfulness alive. Yes, all of us are capable of being mindful, but our mindfulness vanishes very quickly. We need the Sangha to keep our mindfulness alive for a longer time.

When you are mindful, concentrated, you are a Buddha. But many of us are part-time Buddhas only. We have to learn how to be a full-time Buddha, and that is our path. The old energy always pushes us in the opposite direction—forgetfulness. In order to counter that old energy, you have to create a new habit energy, the habit energy of being mindful. A very nice way, there is no war. There is only a transformation. Meditation is not a fight, even against the old habits, the negative things. To meditate means to embrace the negative. But you

need to have something in order to embrace: what is embracing what? It is the new habit, it is the new energy generated in you, that would be the agent, which embraces the old habit.

In the first dharma talk given here, I said that the old habit energy is very strong. Many times we did not want to do it, many times we did not want to say it. We knew that if we said it, if we did it, it would cause damage. But finally we did it, we said it. We regret it very much later on. We are determined that next time we will not do it, we will not say it, but when the circumstances arise we do it again, we say it again. It has caused a lot of damage within us. We are frustrated because we have the feeling that it is stronger than us, in fact it is stronger. Because our mindfulness is too weak. That is why we come together and practice touching the seed of mindfulness, helping it grow, learning how to increase our capacity of being mindful, our capacity of keeping our mindfulness alive. When we have that energy, we have something with which to embrace those old bad habits, the negative things. And embracing them long enough, we will diminish the power of the negative. It is like the heat in the home. When we want to refresh the atmosphere in the home we turn the air conditioning on. The cool air isn't going to fight the hot air. The cool air comes and embraces the hot air, and it makes the hot air cooler. But the important thing is that the cool air must be continually generated. You cannot turn it on and then turn it off. So you have to learn how to keep mindfulness alive for a longer period of time so your mindfulness can have enough time to embrace your forgetfulness, your negative habit energy, with tenderness, and not with an intention to fight.

Every time your habit energy shows itself, begins to manifest, thanks to our mindful breathing, mindful walking, you recognize it, and you smile at it. You say, “I know that you are there, I am taking good care of you,” and you embrace it. That's our practice: no fighting. You should know that we are not responsible for the habit energy all by ourselves. Many of these habits have been transmitted. Some of them have been transmitted by our mother or by our father, and when we see that energy coming up we can say, “Hello Mother, I know you are there. I will take good care of you.” Then you are in good hands again. Mindfulness is the Buddha. The Buddha is taking care of you. Don't worry. You know how to invite the Buddha, and to keep him, keep her, with you. The techniques of walking, of breathing, of doing things mindfully, is what we learn while being in Plum Village.

We have to know a little bit about ourselves in order for the practice to be easy and natural, and according to the teaching of the Buddha we are made of five elements. There is a teacher of mathematics who trained here who went back to Toronto. When he resumed his classes, he wiped the board with mindfulness,

slowly and peacefully. His students were very surprised. They asked him, “Are you OK, Daddy?” because he was very much in a hurry before. He turned around and said, “No, I'm OK, I'm trying to do it mindfully.” I was wiping the board in mindfulness and his image appeared again to me.

Suppose we draw a circle here representing something like an orange, and suppose that the orange has five sections. So this is the first section, the second one, the third one, the fourth and the fifth. The first section of the orange represents our body, our form, *rupa*. Meditation has to do with our body. There are many sutras, many scriptures, about how to meditate on our body. The second section of the orange represents our feelings. To meditate is also to observe our feelings, to take care of our feelings, and we have to learn how. In Plum Village, we don't learn Buddhism; we learn only how to practice well.

Then we have our perceptions. To meditate is to become mindful of the perceptions, to look deeply into the perceptions, in order to see their nature. Mindfulness is intervening to shine light upon our perceptions. Many times our perceptions are wrong and mindfulness helps us to see that they are wrong. When we know that a perception is wrong, we are liberated. It is like when in twilight you see a snake, you get scared, you run, you scream, and when a friend brings a torch, you recognize that it's not a snake. It is only a piece of rope. That is a wrong perception. Wrong perceptions always create anger, fear, distress, and so on. That is why meditating on perceptions helps to dissipate a lot of suffering.

Mental formation is the fourth section of the orange. “Formation” is a technical term: it means things that are made by different elements, like this flower is a formation. If we look deeply into the flower, we see many components, like the rain, the sunshine, the clouds, the soil, the minerals, the farmer, the gardener, and so on. When something is made from different kinds of elements, that something manifests itself as the object of our perception, and it is called a formation. All formations are impermanent. Here we have business with mental formations. Fear is a mental formation. Craving is a mental formation. Compassion is also a mental formation. Love is a mental formation. There are many wholesome mental formations; there are unwholesome mental formations. In my tradition we distinguish fifty-one categories of mental formations. As a novice I had to learn them by heart: wholesome mental formations, unwholesome mental formations, and so on.

I have to tell you that feeling is also a mental formation, and perception is also a mental formation, but they are too important. That is why you have to single them out as a category. This kind of analysis is not for the sake of analysis. This analysis is for the sake of practice. You have to remember that if in the teaching

of the Buddha there is an analysis, the analysis is to help you to see and to practice well. It does not mean that this is the only way to present reality. No. Buddhism is not there to give you the only way, the only description of reality. The teachers are there to help you to understand yourself and to practice well.

So feeling is one of the fifty-one mental formations, perception is another one, therefore this category has only forty-nine mental formations. These mental formations don't manifest all at the same time. If they do, I think we cannot be alive. Imagine the television set and every channel manifests at the same time: not possible. So just one or two, sometimes three, but I think three is the maximum. This section of the orange represents something like the screen of our television, or the screen of the computer. Let us use the image of the computer. So each program appears on the screen of the computer, and you can bring some other things up to intervene. You can make a window; you can paste something in, for instance. If I lived in the time of the Buddha I could not give a dharma talk like this because they would not know what a computer is! So when they don't manifest, where are they? They must be somewhere, hidden somewhere, in order to manifest one by one like that. That is why we need the fifth section of the orange. It's called “consciousness.”

Consciousness here means the lower part of our consciousness. In the Sarvastivada school it is called the base consciousness, the consciousness of the base. In Mahayana Buddhism we call it “store consciousness” because it has the capacity to store all the mental formations so that each of them will be able to manifest later as a mental formation.

I spoke to you at the beginning of the Dharma talk about this section of the orange: consciousness as the soil of the mind, containing all kinds of seeds. Each mental formation stays there in the form of a seed. A seed means something that has not manifested yet. That is the technical term “*bija*,” seeds. So your anger is there in the form of a seed. Now you are not angry at anyone, you are fine, but that does not mean that anger is not in you. It is in you, but in the form of a seed only. You may think that anger is not in you, but that is not correct. If someone comes and says something, and touches that seed of anger, you will see that seed manifests itself and you will soon be overwhelmed by the energy of anger.

So bija is the seed, and we have all kinds of seeds in us, positive and negative. We have the seed of perfect enlightenment in us that is the Buddha-to-be in us. We have the seed of Mara in us. We have the seed of holiness in us, and we have the seed of un-holiness in us. So sometimes we may be called “His Holiness,” sometimes “His Un-holiness.” The mind is a screen upon which every mental formation can be revealed. A good practitioner knows how to keep the negative

seeds here [in the storehouse consciousness], and tries by his or her practice to help the positive seeds to manifest. If the positive seeds continue to manifest here, the negative seeds become smaller, smaller, less important. When they are tiny, not important, it is difficult for them to manifest. I don't get angry very often. Even when I get angry, you might not see it. You may say, “I have never seen Thây angry,” and you believe anger is not in me. That is not true. The seed of anger is always in me, but since I practice I don't give it a lot of chance.

You also have to see things in terms of inter-being. When you practice do not entertain the hope that you will wipe out all the negative things in you. Please don't! It's like a gardener. She only wants to have flowers and no garbage in her garden. But it is a necessity for a flower to become garbage. You cannot keep a flower alive forever and ever. There will be a time when a flower has become a piece of garbage. The love in us can be like that, is like that too. But a good organic gardener is not afraid of garbage, because she knows perfectly how to transform the garbage back into flowers. Both flowers and garbage are made of organic matter. Mental formations are also organic. This is very interesting: all our mental formations are of an organic nature. That is why we can transform. Love can be transformed into hate. But if you have hate, don't be afraid. Learn, learn how to transform your hate back into flowers. Many couples after two, three years living together, see that their love has transformed into hate. In the beginning, “How can I survive without her?” But now, “How can I survive with her?”

So love has transformed into hate. But if we know the law of transformation, we know also that it is possible for us to transform garbage back into flowers. The hate, anger, if we know how, we can transform them. So may I urge you not to be afraid of your sorrow, your pain, your afflictions. Don't be eager to throw them away, because it is exactly with these materials that you can fabricate the flower of understanding and love in you. That is the principle of non-duality that is so important in the Buddhist tradition. An organic gardener is not afraid of the heap of garbage. She is confident. She does not want to throw the garbage away because she knows that she is capable of transforming the garbage back into flowers, into lettuce, cucumbers. So smile to them, say “I know you are there, I am going to take good care of you and make you into flowers.” Don't throw anything away.

So day is because night is. Enlightenment and affliction, they inter-are. It is like the lotus. Although they are fragrant, beautiful, refreshing, all of them grow from the mud. But they don't smell like mud. That is why the Buddhists like very much to use the symbol of the lotus. You live in the world of afflictions, of suffering, and yet you are able to make use of them, to transform them. You live

in the world, but you are not overwhelmed or affected by the world. Instead you can help the world to transform.

If you live in a couple, if you live in a family, if you live with another person or several persons, you may ask them to be careful. You may ask them to be aware of the seeds you have in your store consciousness. “Darling, I know that I have these negative seeds in me. And every time these seeds manifest, I make myself suffer and I make you suffer, also. So, please, if you love me, if you care for me, be careful not to water these seeds in me.” Among lovers, there should be such an agreement. That is the practice. “Darling, if you really love me, water the positive seeds in me, because I do have the seeds of understanding, of compassion, of forgiveness, of joy in me. Even if they are still small, if you know how to touch them in me every day, I become a much happier person and when I am happy, you don't have to suffer as much.”

If you really understand what your store consciousness is, you understand yourself. If you understand the person you love with her weaknesses and her strengths, you would know what we call the practice of selective watering of seeds. Refrain from watering the negative seeds in him. Try your best to identify and to water the positive seeds in him every day, and you will see the situation will improve in just one week. The degree of happiness will increase very quickly, especially when you are supported by brothers and sisters within the practice to show you the way.

Consciousness sometimes is called *sarva bijaka*. “Bija” means seeds and “sarva” means all, all seeds. This is the totality of the seeds that are in you, the consciousness of the totality of the seeds.

When you live mindfully, you will be able to identify each variety of seeds that is about to manifest. When there is a stimuli and a seed is about to manifest, you know already and you immediately begin the practice of mindful breathing and walking. Stop everything else. This is very important. If you don't, the seed will manifest. When the seed manifests it is still possible for you to practice, but it is better that you practice when it is about to manifest. If you can do that it means that you have been practicing mindful walking, mindful breathing for several weeks. When a seed is about to be agitated, to be watered, you know and you put yourself in a state of being alert and you practice. You practice for you, yes, but you practice for him, for her. She will be grateful for you because you know how to take care of yourself, because taking care of yourself is to take care of him or her.

"I walk for you, I breathe for you." Selective watering of seeds is your practice and it does not take a long time. You can transform your situation very quickly.